~ *Part 7* ~
Reflections on a Common Theme
Railroads and Depots

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CLOUD COUNTY

Cloud County has two railroad stories: one about the several lines that came to Concordia, and one about the Solomon Branch of the Union Pacific which is east and north of the Solomon River, passing through Glasco. No railroad connected Glasco and Concordia.

The Central Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad came to Cloud County in January, 1878. It was the main link from Concordia to Kansas City, with mail and passenger service. It ran through Clyde, Concordia, Yuma, and Jamestown.

Concordia became one of the most flourishing railroad centers in north-central Kansas. The Burlington and Missouri, Santa Fe, Union Pacific. and the Missouri Pacific gave it connection with the east, west, north, and south. The Missouri Pacific connected with Beloit.

The railroad bridge over the Republican River east of Concordia is the only remaining evidence of the Burlington and Missouri which ran from Odell, Nebraska, to Concordia, 1884-1982.

The 1917 Union Pacific depot in Concordia has been completely restored and is now the National Orphan Train Museum. It contains exhibits on the children and adults involved in the history of the Orphan Train Movement. The Freight Room, Men's and Women's Waiting Rooms, and Station Master's Office provide the setting for pictures, stories, and activities.

In 1983, the Missouri Pacific merged with the Union Pacific. After the merger, the connecting link east from Concordia to Kansas City was discontinued and trains from Concordia were routed west to Beloit and then southeast on the Solomon Branch of the Union Pacific through Glasco.

The Kansas Pacific built a branch through the Solomon Valley and established stations at Glasco and Simpson.. It reached Glasco in 1878, and the town immediately began to grow. The depot was built shortly afterward. The Union Pacific closed the depot June 30, 1975. Paul Hoops was the last depot agent in Glasco. The depot was destroyed by a wind storm in 1978. The Union Pacific leased its track to Kyle Railroad in 1991. Kyle Railroad passes through Glasco en route to Asherville, Beloit, and points west, although grain is no longer loaded in Glasco, for the elevators there have closed.

A small wooden depot was built in Simpson at the same time. This abandoned, gray weathered station still stands next to the track in Simpson, in view of all who eat at Trappers, only a block away. This depot is a link to our railroad history.

MITCHELL COUNTY by Carldon Broadbent

The railroad track reached Beloit in 1878. Eventually two railroad companies had use of the line: the Missouri Pacific and the Union Pacific. Freight to supply the needs of the cities along the line was the main cargo, along with the passengers. Not like today, when the main cargo is grain, oil, and other natural products, and no passengers!

In the early days many of the travelers were the salesmen who peddled their products, taking orders from the merchants of the town. The Avenue Hotel in Beloit was the main headquarters for these men for the few days that they solicited orders for their products. Then on they traveled west to the next city. Other passengers were local people traveling to neighboring towns.

In the early 1900s the railroad was the best way to get to Salina. Two trains each day departed and arrived in Beloit. To Salina and back in one day! If the citizens wanted to go to Frankfort, in

Northeastern Kansas, for instance, they took the Missouri Pacific line to Scottsville and to the cities in Washington County, or on east.

A pictorial drawing of early Beloit shows the railroad line with the depot and small roundhouse. It probably was useful for only small repairs, or for reversing the engine. The large roundhouse was on west in Osborne County at Downs where complete engine repairs took place.

Since the KYLE company has had charge of the line, many improvements have taken place. Millions of tons of grain are shipped east, most to Salina, so the rails and ties are constantly upgraded to withstand the enormous weight. Many of these trains pull up to 200 cars of grain. Two engines are necessary to pull this load. Never a passenger now travels on this track.

Another railroad line going through Mitchell County was the Missouri Pacific, coming from Concordia, through the little village of Scottsville, a thriving place in those days with several hundred persons, with schools, churches, and many merchants. Today the current map lists a population of 19 persons. The Farmway Coop Elevator is the main business, along with Smith's Demolition and Salvage. The community church is still there.

The Central Branch rail line ran through Scottsville in 1878 when the town started. The citizens decided among themselves to name it Scottsville after Thomas Scott, who was in charge of building the line. An urban legend has been passed down which says that the citizens were so anxious to have the railroad pass through the town, that they promised an adequate supply of water for the engines. A well was dug, but no water was struck. What to do? When the engineers came to inspect the route, citizens who had wagons and tanks, hauled water and filled the well. Scottsville got their train. The train engineer ever after made sure to fill up the water car at Concordia or Beloit. Water was scarce in those days in the high uplands around Scottsville, as there are no streams or ground water. The soil is rich, however, growing many crops. In the 1890s the main crop was broom corn. And all the livestock for sale was shipped by cattle car.

By 1918, the line was known as the Missouri Pacific. The 1917 Atlas shows two elevators and the stockyards along the tracks.

At the present time the KYLE company has charge of the tracks and hauls the grain, tankers, fertilizer and other goods from the east through Concordia to Beloit, where they are added to the KYLE line there. After leaving Scottsville, the train comes to Gilbert Station, which no longer loads out grain, and the line crosses Highway 9 where there are crossing lights to stop vehicle traffic as the trains are quite long. The only other crossing lights are in Beloit.

Although the KYLE Railroad needs no depot today, the 1911 brick depot with the red tile roof stands today, thanks to a group of dedicated persons who raised funds and also did much labor to restore the Missouri Pacific depot building which needed much repair, including a new tile roof. Brick pillars for fencing stand around the edge of the property. In recent years this depot has been used as a community center, and has hosted plays, art shows, and Christmas programs. Thanks to all those who gave the funds, and volunteered their labor and support. We like our "Magnificent Missouri Pacific depot."

The railroad line running from Lincoln up through Mitchell County going through Hunter and Tipton was laid before 1917 and was known as the Salina-Osborne Railroad. It continued into Osborne County. Because it missed the little village of Hunter, in the southwest corner of Mitchell County, the citizens of Hunter simply jacked up the few buildings and moved them four miles east to the railroad. Of interest is the fact that one of those buildings is still standing, and until a few years ago, serving as a café.

Sometime later the line was known as the Santa Fe Railroad. For a decade or more it has been abandoned and the crossings have been paved over. Now there is a start to restoring the tracks, which would be a million-dollar construction project, with new ties, new rock ballast, and new rails where needed.

Funds from the Federal Department of Transportation were released to the Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad owned by Watco Companies, LLC, Pittsburg, and they have begun the restoration of the line. The line runs from Salina to Corinth, just north of Tipton, which is over the Osborne County line. This company will work closely with AgMark, the grain marketing section of Farmway Coop, Beloit, getting the wheat, milo, corn, and soybeans shipped out of this locale. The future of the elevator at Hunter, which handles millions of bushels of grains, will be greatly advanced in the months to come. As of now, all grain is hauled by truck over the highway.

Hunter was declared a third-class city in 1919, and at one time had a population of 250. Now once again, the 70 people of Hunter will hear the sound of the train whistle as it speeds past the highway crossing.

OSBORNE COUNTY by Eileen Wilson

Downs: a Railroad Town. The Missouri Pacific Railroad
   Downs had the first passenger division west of Atchison on the Central Branch and the second freight division. The railroad branched here, one line going south and west as far as Stockton, the other to Lenora, 90 miles northwest. The town was named for Major Downs who was Superintendent of the railroad at the time it was built. (He was never known to have been in Downs.) Downs was organized as a city in 1879 and grew to a population of 300 when about six months old. With excellent facilities, Downs became the leading shipping point in the west.
   A round house was built in Downs and had an eight-stall capacity with car shops where repairs were done for the western division. There were also coal chutes and bins for storing a large supply of coal. The machinery was run by a 40-horsepower engine which also pumped the water supply for the company.
   The passenger and freight depot was the largest west of Concordia. Trains were "made up" here, going both east and west. There were 8 passenger and 8 freight trains daily with extras during busy seasons.
   The yard handled 25,000 to 30,000 cars each year, 200 to 500 cars of stock were shipped each year and nearly as much grain.
   About 100 railroad employees built homes in Downs. The employees and their families added 400 to 500 people to the city's population.
   The handsome brick depot in Downs was built in 1917, after the original wooden depot burned on November 15, 1916. The Downs Historical Railroad Foundation, as part of the Downs Historical Society, received grant support to restore the depot. Work began in 2002 and is now complete. Located on East Railroad Street, the depot is a popular venue during the annual Kansas Storytelling Festival held in Downs.

Osborne: Mo Pac and Santa Fe
   Osborne had the Missouri Pacific Railroad coming from Downs and the Santa Fe coming from the southeast. The Santa Fe did not go on from Osborne.
   Each railway had a depot. The Santa Fe was moved north to 2nd Street near Highway 24 and is now the main building of the Osborne County Museum. The Missouri Pacific depot was moved to north 2nd just south of the Pizza Hut and for a short time housed a restaurant. It was soon closed and the building put up for sale. After sitting empty for several years, Dr. Duane Muck purchased it and moved it to his property.
   There are few trains now and only when they come in to move grain. This is on the Missouri Pacific line.

ROOKS COUNTY   by Roger Hrabe

   In 1884 the Missouri Pacific Railroad was extended from Osborne County to the Rooks County community of Woodston. The extended line was called the Rooks County Railroad. James Sollenberger and John Hornish disagreed as to which person's land the depot should be built. Sollenberger proposed to the railroad that if they would build the depot on his land he would give every other block in the new city of Woodston. The railroad accepted the proposal and built the depot on the north side of the railroad tracks. In 1910, the depot was moved to the south side of the tracks. No reason was given.
   In 1885 the railroad was extended into Stockton. The original plan of the Rooks County Railroad was to extend the tracks all the way to Denver. However, the line never extended beyond Stockton.
   The community of Webster in western Rooks County, looked forward to the coming of the railroad. The town started booming, but when the rail line stopped at Stockton the boom was shattered and the town started to diminish. In 1907, Webster was booming again when the Gulf, a rail company in nearby Plainville, was talking about extending its line from Plainville north to Webster. The Gulf failed to raise the money, and once again Webster's population declined.
   The rail line from Osborne to Stockton continued to be a valuable asset to the communities along the line until talk in 2005 began to center on plans to possibly abandon the line. Numerous attempts were made by local groups to save the line, but eventually the Union Pacific officially abandoned the line and in 2009 and 2010 the tracks were pulled and the railroad ties were salvaged.

Since the Union Pacific line in the southern part of the county had been abandoned years earlier, the county was left with no rail lines for the first time in over 100 years.

GRAHAM & SHERIDAN COUNTY
Information taken from "Remembering Union Pacific's Plainville Branch" by Mary Ridgway
and Mike Boss and "Union Pacific's Plainville Branch" by Larry D. Dilts

The Plainville Branch was a prominent rail line in central and northwestern Kansas and important to the economic development of the region. It was originally created for servicing large Kansas farming and stockyard centers in remote areas of Kansas. The new line out of Salina shipped fuel (coal), building materials, and other merchandise into remote areas of Kansas, and shipped agricultural and livestock products out of those areas. In addition, the railroad stockholders fostered the economic development of western Kansas by encouraging people to relocate to towns along the line–incentive being that the cost of land in western Kansas was 1/10th of what it cost in the eastern part of the state.

In 1886 the Salina, Lincoln and Western Railway Company began construction on the first section of a 108-mile-long track running northwestward from Salina to five miles west of Plainville. About fifteen towns were located along the line and the trains stopped in each of them. Other railroad companies were quickly becoming established in western Kansas. The Oakley and Colby Railroad built a 21-mile stretch of track northwestward from Oakley to Colby in the same year the SL&W. opened. Two years later, in 1888, the Lincoln and Colorado Railway Company connected the two lines with a 96-mile stretch of track. On October 22, 1888, when all three railroad lines were connected, about one and a half miles west of Penokee, a golden-spike ceremony was held in celebration of the accomplishment. The first train into Hill City was the "Pomeroy Special" carrying a gigantic load of building materials for James P. Pomeroy, a prominent Hill City business man and philanthropist. Four weeks later. on November 18, 1888, the first passenger train arrived in Hill City.

Plainville was established as the division point between Salina and Colby, and the three lines operated together until the 1890s. In October 1898 the Union Pacific Railroad assumed ownership of all three railroad lines, which created UP's longest branch line. The Plainville Branch was an economic link to larger shipping centers. The cattle ranches of western Kansas depended on it. Every Saturday for decades, the "Cattlemen's Special," train number 190, departed Colby for Salina. All along the Plainville Branch the train picked up preloaded cattle cars and transported them, via Salina, to Kansas City for Monday morning trade. The last of the stockyards along the line were retired in 1965.

In 1889 there were two scheduled daily trains running each direction except Sundays. After being reduced to one train daily in 1890s due to economic woes, the schedules returned to two daily by 1902. Union Pacific first introduced the Pullman 74-passenger car and accompanying baggage/freight car on November 28, 1928. Throughout their 30 years of operation on the line, two of these motorcars kept the same train numbers: 533 westbound and 534 eastbound. Automobiles eventually became a more popular mode of travel and eventually displaced the passenger rail service. May 31, 1958, was the last day of service between Oakley and Salina for passenger trains. It was the end of an era in western Kansas, not only for the residents but also for the Lincoln branch employees such as the conductor who rode it every day for 42 years and the mail clerk who was on the line for 50 years. In the mid to late 1980s scheduled trains were eliminated with trains running as needed to serve the grain elevators. The line was in full operation until the floods of 1993 caused damage to the track located between Salina and Plainville. Subsequently, UPRR determined that rebuilding that section of the branch line would not be cost effective. The damaged section was dismantled in 1995 and the only remaining part of the line from Plainville to Colby was dismantled during 1997 and 1998.

Bogue's depot, built in 1888, was one of the larger depots on the branch at 24x80. The agency at Bogue closed June 18, 1971, and the depot retired in 1972. It was declared surplus property by the UPRR and sold to an area farmer. On June 28, 1973, it was moved to his farm to be used as a storage building.

Hill City's depot was in operation for about 100 years (from 1888 to about 1988). After being taken out of service, the depot was purchased for its timber and torn down around 1990. The timber was reused by the owner to repair other buildings.

Penokee's first depot was destroyed by a fire that resulted from being struck by lightning on August 26, 1915. During the blaze, the faithful telegraph agent was at his post frantically notifying

headquarters that his depot was burning. The replacement depot, constructed in 1916, is a rare "pagoda" style building. It was moved in 1994 to the grounds of the Ellis Railroad Museum.

Morland's first depot was consumed by a fire on February 18, 1909. The depot was rebuilt in the same year and is the only depot still standing in its original location in Graham County. On the west outskirts of Morland was a 145-foot Pegram Truss and 20-span timber trestle which was the largest bridge on the Plainville branch crossing the South Fork of the Solomon River.

Studley's depot was located about one-half mile to the west of town at milepost 155.41. It served the railroad until the station closed May 20, 1960. The depot was retired in 1961 and sold but remains in its original location. The building has slowly deteriorated over the years and today remains in a state of disrepair.

Tasco's depot, at 20x30 feet, was one of the smaller depots on the Plainville branch. Although the depot had been closed earlier, it was retired in the 1960s and moved off site to another location in Tasco. A small building with a dispatcher's telephone served the railroad needs in 1954 after the depot was closed.

Hoxie's original depot burned down in 1947. In May 1949 a smaller 24x64-foot masonry and frame depot was constructed in a 1940s' style architecture. The new depot was air-conditioned while the other older ones were not. The station was closed in 1983 and the depot retired in 1984. Later the masonry passenger side of the depot was demolished while the freight side was sold and moved to a farm and used as a garage.